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(Mrs. Cross)

CALGARY MAN RECALLS EXPERIENCES DRIVING NORTH COACH IN 1884.

Driving from Calgary to Edmonton in two days with a team and democrat, to show a governor that it could be done--encountering murder and a hold-up on the Edmonton trail--dispatch carrying during the rebellion of 1884. (Sic) Adventures such as these were counted as merely part of the day's routine to George Elliott, veteran stage driver, sourdough and trader, now living in retirement in Calgary.

He was born in Ontarion in the town of Perth and at an early age left home to come west with a survey party. In 1884 he drove the Calgary-Edmonton stage until the outbreak of the rebellion, when he undertook to carry dispatches for Generals Strange and Steele from Calgary to the north. This was at the time of the Frog Lake massacre. When the rebellion was quelled he resumed his stage-driving.

The railway reached Calgary in 1883 and a stage line was then established between Calgary and Edmonton, which continued uhtil the railway reached Strathcona, July 27, 1891. The Edmonton Bulletin of August 4, 1883, contained the following announcement:

"Edmonton and Calgary stage making weekly trips between said points leaves Jasper House, Edmonton, Monday at nine, and the steamboat dock at 9:30, stopping at Peace Hills, Battle River, Red Deer Crossing and Willow Creek, and arriving at Calgary on Friday. Returning leaves Calgary, Monday, stopping at same places and arrives at Edmonton on

Friday.. Fare each way $25.00. 100 pounds baggage allowed. .Express matter 10 cents per pound. First stage leaves Edmonton on Monday, August 6th. Edmonton office in Jasper House, Calgary office in Hudson's Bay Company Store.

D. Macleod, Proprietor."

This stage route was in many respects one of the most interesting lines of transportation in the entire west. There are many people living today who will remember the celebrated stopping places along the route, Chamberlains', Sam Scarlett's, the Lone Pine, Miller's at the Spruces, (10 miles south of the Red Deer River), Blindman, Barnett's, Bear's Hill, Boggy Plain, and finally Edmonton.

It took five days to make the trip, with the one exception when Governor Rigley was making a tour of inspection of the forts. A record run was made with a team and democrat, and it took only two days to reach Edmonton from Calgary. Horses were changed at every stopping place. Ordinarily they were only changed once along the route, at the Blindman River.

In 1886 the stage was held up just two miles from Johnson-Stevenson's, a well known stopping place, some 20 miles from Calgary. This was on a return trip. Mr. Elliott was not driving this time, but another well known driver known as "Little Pete" Campbell. The bandits had black handerkchiefs over their faces, but were recognized despite their disguise. One of them was riding a big roan horse belonging to a man named Scott.

There was always a heavy mail for the north trip, but on the south trip it was light. The postmaster at Edmonton had put the registered mail in the bottom of the stage and thrown some empty sacks over it. The hold-up men pulled out the empty sacks but neglected to look further, with the result that their haul was not so large, amounting to about $900, taken from the passengers.

Later a party went to the shack where the man Scott lived and found him lying dead on the floor. The hold-up men were murderers as well. They were traced as far as Denver, Colorado, but the evidence against them was not sufficiently strong to warrant their arrest.

These stages could accommodate four passengers in the back and one in front with the driver. "Upon some occasions", Mr. Elliott recalls, "I have seen two loaded stages and one democrat with a single team, pull out of Calgary for the north together." Such was the amount of mail, and the number of passengers. Among the passengers often listed on his stage were Bishop Pinkham, Judge Rouleau and many other equally well known people.

What changes have occurred since then! In these days of fast trains, motor buses and graveled highways, it is hard to vizualize mile upon mile of prairie and bush land with a thin trail winding away into the distance. A great sigh of relief must have gone up when the passengers sighted the little log stopping places scattered every 20 miles or so along the way.

Mr. Elliott kept the mail station at Blindman River for a year or more, then after retiring from the stage

driving when the railroad was finally completed, he kept a trading post on Wolf Creek. Pat (now Senator) Burns and C.J. Duggan were frequent callers here during the course of business transactions, he remembers.

Then came the gold rush days, and Mr. Elliott went up into the Yukon, where he remained for eight years. Many mishaps and adventures befell him here. His original idea had been to start a store in Dawson City, but Fate, always the fickle hade, was against him, and crossing Dutch Harbor with their supplies his party had the misfortune to lose everything when the boat sank during a sudden storm. He only escaped with the clothes he wore.

But nothing daunted, Mr. Elliott secured a team of ten dogs at St. Michael's at the mouth of the Yukon River and proceeded to freight up and down the river. When spring came he went mining, working along the different creeks. During this time he did not see a white woman for five years.

He recalled many famous characters of the Yukon days. There were 25,000 people on that little flat where Dawson City stood. "Where", as he laughingly recalled, "a good meal cost four or five dollars". It was a sort of melting pot of humanity, where scores of people, good and bad, rich and poor, high and low, mingled indiscriminately.

Some of those he remembers were Jack London and Robert W. Service, who were camped together right across the road from him. Then there was Kate Ryan, the famous nurse of the Yukon, and "Diamond Tooth Gertie", a variety actress, who instead of gold fillings in her teeth had diamonds.

After leaving the Yukon Mr. Elliott next went into Northern British Columbia in charge of the Kildare Mining Plant. After a number of years there he returned to Alberta, where he has been actively engaged in business until a few years ago.

He is truly a "real old timer", with a host of memories to draw upon, although he somewhat inclined to regard these adventures of his lightly, and remarks, with that winning smile which is characteristic, that it is all "nothing much, but you can say I am still in the ring".